

Relate NI



**“Take A Breath”
With Your Family**

About Relate NI

Relate NI is passionate about enabling good quality relationships and that's why our mission is to make expert information and support for healthy relationships available to everyone. Through our experience of working with parents and children throughout Northern Ireland, we've come to understand that relationships not only give our lives meaning, they are of vital importance to our happiness.

For the last 70+ years, we have been supporting the health and wellbeing of children & young people, individuals, couples, and families through our therapeutic services because we know how important our relationships are to our health and wellbeing.

Relate NI continues to provide support services at this time, in order to ensure that people and communities have access to high quality, professional relationship support which can improve wellbeing.

Visit our website for more guidance on how to 'Take A Breath' in order to Relieve The Pressure on you and your relationships.



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88% of attendees
would recommend
Relate NI to a
friend or colleague

Introduction

Our relationships are under pressure at the moment.

The pandemic has exacerbated relationship tensions in so many ways – including within our family relationships.

The cost of living has added its own set of . additional pressures -money worries and unrealistic expectations

Eventually, the pressure may become too much and begin to affect us as individuals as well as creating unhelpful conflict within our families

The result may be that we start to notice new barriers in our relationships, or existing ones become exacerbated.

This is an uncertain time for both children and adults. As we to navigate toward ‘normality’ as effectively and calmly as possible, we may start to question what normality is within our family relationships and if it is something we want to return too.

It is equally important for us to prepare ourselves and our families so as to prevent ourselves from becoming overwhelmed from the additional pressures from the cost of living.
.crisis

This book aims to provide ideas on how you can Take A Breath in order to Relieve the Pressure on yourself and your relationships with your family.



Families Under Pressure

As we have moved forward out of lockdown, many people will have been excited to see their wider family and social circles and spend time together.

However, the reality may have been different than what was expected. A family member may have unfortunately passed away or you might feel like your family weren't available when you needed them during the lockdowns. As a result, you may be struggling to find ways to move forward together.

You and your family have made it this far. You have all been through so much together as a family and as individuals.

There has been pressure from all sides, the possibility of work changes – maybe working from home while trying to simultaneously home school proved too difficult and you had to stop working. Perhaps your work was on the frontline & the huge impact of balancing risk & home life continues for you where it has improved for many.

Perhaps your job has disappeared in the economic fallout from Covid19 and money is a constant worry, which has been exacerbated by the rising costs of living.

Children & teenagers lost their routine and contact with their friends and extended family members for many months as they stayed at home under lockdown. This has impacted their emotional development and you are beginning to notice the fall out from this.

Pressure for young people to consistently do well at school in case they need to rely on this work for a predicted grade and not knowing how their future will be impacted are all significant experiences.

The worry that parents or grandparents could get sick and who would look after them has troubled many young people. Grandparents and older family members, may have suffered from the lack of the unique bond with the children in the family which is mutually beneficial for wellbeing.

For adult families, separation may have been completely cut for a long time. Perhaps your parents live in sheltered accommodation or residential care & contact was completely severed for many months. You may have missed significant life events in family members lives including birthdays, weddings, births and sadly even funerals.

Now as we move forward, there is an expectation for life to again be 'normal' or 'perfect', and even where many routines have returned to normal, you might be feeling anything but!

So, how can you continue to support yourself and your family to move forward as gently and enjoyably as possible?



Communicating Effectively

Families who are able to hold onto their sense of humour, who can support each other, communicate openly & have a sense of commitment & responsibility towards one another can manage well together. Sometimes some of these characteristics can fall into distress. This can lead to communication being unclear or unhelpful, which causes trust to be hurt. A growing sense of disconnection happens causing repeated & unresolved arguments. A family can become deflated & unmotivated over time.

There are ways you can nurture the helpful qualities & get back on track by

paying attention to the cornerstone of all relationships –communication.

Communication is the foundation that supports a family to work well together. Clear, open & frequent communication supports all family members in having strong, mutually helpful relationships.

Try to reinforce efforts to communicate effectively, especially as we try to navigate what appears to be another difficult year of Covid.

Time spent communicating and making plans now will help everyone manage the highs and lows that potential reduced social interactions may bring for families.



Taking A Breath With Your Family

Communicate often.

It is important to find the time to talk as there can be so many distractions. Talk in the car, turn the gadgets off for one evening, eat together, organise informal 'talking times' to share each other's news or important issues, talk with your children at bedtime.

Listen.

Be an active listener! There's no point everyone talking if no one listens but also think about the quality of your listening. Listen to understand what your child or partner is saying & be respectful of their stories, news & experiences.

If you don't quite know what they're talking about, ask them, 'help me understand a bit more?' or 'tell me a bit more about that?'

Open & honest communication.

Parents can create a secure & supportive environment for the children to talk. This will

set up a pattern of trusting, strong relationships that children can bring forward into their friendships & future relationships. They're learning from you how to negotiate life's curves and bends and setting a good example will help them understand how to do this.

Be positive.

Take the time to encourage & compliment one another. Positive communication enables the more challenging conversations when they need to take place because positive communication builds strong relationships. Unhappy family relationships can develop because of a lot of criticism, which in turn causes defensiveness.



Time.

An indirect, though powerful, way to communicate your commitment to each other as a family is to spend time together. Set aside time when you're not checking emails or distracted by chores & really commit to being together.

Give you're your siblings or wider family a call, talk about their experiences or have them show you some photos from times and events that you may have missed.

Or if you feeling confident and safe enough to do so, you could make some time this New Year to reconnect with wider family members. If you are trying to get fitter and healthier this New Year, perhaps you could invite family members to join you in these efforts such as for short walks, coffees or shopping trips or whatever else you like to do.

Spend time apart.

It's important to have your own interests & activities, too. Individuals can become lost in a family so having your own thing to do as well supports everyone –you can enjoy time away & enjoy coming back to the family.

Wind down.

About an hour before bedtime try to wind down, read stories or listen to some music. Find a gentle way to close the day that will set you all up for a good nights' sleep.

Parenting Apart.

Families come in all shapes & sizes. Co- parenting following separation can bring its own challenges & these can be exacerbated if family member vulnerability means you have to continue to practice strict social distancing. While you no longer share each other's lives you continue to share the responsibility for your children & an understanding that your decisions impact on the children's well-being.

Your commitment to your children is communicated through providing a secure, reliable environment for them. Make time to discuss in advance what you both would like to happen as you move forward. Also think about what the kids would want to happen. If you can, make agreements about what will happen and make every effort to stick to those plans.

As you can see ideas about creating & sustaining a happy & helpful family are not complicated. They certainly don't involve vast expenditure.

There is a lot of pressure on parents to jump straight into socialising, attending events and going to visitor attractions. Think back to your own childhood however, it is likely the time spent together than you remember fondly.

If we've understood anything from the



pandemic, it is we cannot take life for granted.

Everything we recognised from before & didn't even have to think about has changed. The most precious gift in our lives each & every day are the relationships we share & are privileged to be part of.

Those relationships shift & change. Those changes can be welcomed sometimes & they can be unwanted at other times but we still have to find a way to navigate them.

You don't have to do it on your own though. If your family is experiencing hurt or disappointment, one of the supports available to you is Relate NI Family Counselling.

Family relationship support can be helpful for supporting relationships within the family system, as well as their impacts on individual family members. We work with all kinds of families, including adopted families, blended families, families with LGBTQ+ individuals or families who may be in the process of separating.

What Next

The tips and guidance contained in this book are aimed at helping you Take A Breath in order to manage the pressures on you and your children. Relate NI's team of skilled and professional counsellors are also available to help people with their relationship issues, whether big or small. Your relationship doesn't need to be at a time of crisis to benefit from Relate NI services. In fact, 70% of people who use our services last year told us they wished they'd attended sooner.

Use the details below to contact us to find out how we can support you.

Relate NI services continue to be available at this time. If you would benefit from speaking to one of our trained counsellors, contact us at:

**028 90323454
office@relateni.org**

Relate NI Services:

- **Adult Relationship Counselling for Individuals & Couples**
- **Family Counselling**
- **Relate Kids**
- **Relate Teen**
- **Sex Therapy**

www.relateni.org/services



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